

Tuesday, February 16, 2010

Comments to the Appropriations Committee: State Agency Budget Presentations
Elementary & Secondary Education

Good evening Senator Harp, Representative Geragosian, and members of the Appropriations Committee.

My name is Bruce Douglas, and I serve as the Executive Director of the Capitol Region Education Council (CREC), and today I speak for Connecticut's Alliance of Regional Education Service Centers.

Interdistrict Cooperative Grants were designed for the express purpose of supporting programs that reduce racial, ethnic and economic isolation as well as increase student achievement, particularly in the curriculum areas of reading, writing, mathematics, and science. The added benefit to students and families is the greater awareness of cultural diversity and multicultural education, as all programs must have a diverse population of students participating. It is projected that approximately 34,000 students will benefit from 136 varied programs each year.

While I understand the state is in a difficult economic position, the impact of reducing the allocation for Interdistrict Cooperative Grants will be felt by everyone. RECS's, school systems, and non-profit agencies will be forced to reduce the opportunities for students to participate in these programs. Many have completed their requirements for the year, or are near completion, and have incurred expenses anticipating reimbursement from SDE.

My request to the Committee is that you continue to support the Interdistrict Cooperative Grants program - not only to maintain the integrity of the Sheff stipulation, but to provide quality academic programming for the youth of Connecticut. In the event that funding must be reduced, we request that any reduction be distributed proportionally state-wide, so that no child is treated less equitably in the availability of services.

Some of the Interdistrict Cooperative Grant programs are only operational in the summer, offering grade appropriate learning, academic enrichment and multicultural learning in a summer school setting. Others offer college credit for successful completion. And still more are designed to allow the students' respective high schools to award credit within the parameters of their course requirements.

Many academic year programs provide after school academic enrichment or meet on Saturdays for continued learning. "Healthy Children, Healthy Minds" focuses on teaching students healthy lifestyle habits and incorporates science and health curriculum standards. The "Capitol Region Interdistrict Leadership

Academy" develops students' leadership skills, fostering a tool that will benefit them throughout their adult lives. "Forensics 101" is interesting to students because it is similar to popular TV shows, and stimulates science learning. "Steel Pan: Improving Writing through Caribbean Culture" is a creative way to get students interested in developing journalism skills. "Words! Action! Theater!" stimulates the creative side of student learning.

Interdistrict Cooperative Grants address the needs of children of all ages across the state, covering a wide variety of programming in every curriculum area. Please consider our mandate of treating each child with equal fairness and compassion as we strive to deliver these services.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you.